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NEW BOOKS REVIEWED

THE JOURNAL OF LEO TOLSTOI, 1895-1899. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1917.

To one who struggles incessantly with doubts and inner differences and against misunderstandings in the minds of others, sincerity may at last come to seem almost as valuable as truth itself. That such was the case with Tolstoi, appears to be indicated by the stress which he is said to have laid upon the disposal of his journal after his death. The first volume of this journal to be published abounds in expressions of sincere self-criticism. "Unclear"; "Nonsense"; "This seemed much clearer to me when I first thought it out"—comments such as these Tolstoi would not infrequently append to his entries, and all too often the stricture is just. There is, moreover, a certain self-abasement, or conscious humility, in writing down one's inmost thoughts in the rough, without attempting to make them more persuasive or clearer than they are in themselves. And it almost seems that, in Tolstoi's mind, this deliberate exposure of unclearness or perplexity, this refusal to make what was obscure into something grandiose, this rejection of sophistry and self-deception, added a certain value to the thought he was attempting to clarify. Otherwise, it is not quite easy to understand why he was so much concerned about discourses that are in many cases tentative and unsure.

Tolstoi's strength lay in his strong consciousness of moral intuition; he was not a trained metaphysician, scarcely a good logician. Moral intuition is the urge toward right conduct and happiness; it is the stimulus to truthful thinking; it is the tendency toward health. In another form, we may perhaps recognize it as the perfection of physical law in the realm of what we call unconscious matter. Moral intuition, therefore, may be properly thought of as "the invariant in human progress"; and all right thinking is in one way or another directed by it. But to think morally, is quite another employment of the mind than to make moral intuition itself the object of thought; and this latter is often the mark both of genius and of a kind of chronic moral invalidism. Tolstoi employed his mind in both ways, with the result that ethically his thought is sometimes as stimulating as a breeze blowing from a snow-capped mountain top, while philosophically it is often as depressing as the atmosphere of a sick-room.

"The meaning of life becomes clear to man when he recognizes, as himself, his divine essence which is enclosed in his bodily envelope. The meaning of this lies in the fact that this being, striving for its

emancipation, for the broadening of the realm of love, accomplishes through this broadening the work of God, which consists in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth." This is clear enough to live by and to think by; it expresses the irresistible feeling and faith of those who live according to the spirit. It is doubtful that any amount of taking thought could make the message clearer, could give greater substance and convincing power to it than it has already obtained through the Old Testament moralities and the New Testament gospel. Yet Tolstoi was always taking thought. Again and again, he expresses essentially the same idea—sometimes in equivalent terms, sometimes poorly and confusedly—never with any real advance. He was never for more than an hour fully satisfied.

And this continual unrest is not surprising since what he craved was nothing less than "a moral justification of living." A genius, he could be content to go on living only on condition that he might in effect grasp the scheme of things entire;—that failing, extinction seemed desirable. This impatience—a trait so characteristic of emotional genius in art or life—explains what seems to be the principal defect in Tolstoi's thinking, an imperfect grasp of the evolutionary principle. For evolution is, in a sense, but another name for patience: it is the patience of God.

Men who have daily before their eyes the incredible miracle of motion—a miracle that yields to no intellectual analysis—balk at the equal miracle of moral progress. Man must know the whole law and do it, or he must be ignorant of the law and hence irresponsible—sink in the seeming dilemma. If evolution is the law, then we can only submit to it as fatal and immutable. If it is not the law, then we must either remain lawless or discover in religion a law that can be fulfilled all at once. All of which is perhaps no more logical than if a bit of matter should say that its choice lay between being in one of a number of places, since such a thing as motion between two points is inconceivable. And so geniuses like Tolstoi and Newman crave a fuller knowledge of the ways of God than is humanly possible, and other men—and nations—drift, either ignoring responsibility or concentrating it in an immoral and irresponsible State.

As a philosopher, Tolstoi in this journal proves to be an idealist, a disciple of Africanus Spier. Idealism may well be a cheerful faith to live by—but then so is almost any belief that recognizes man as something more than an automaton. No one would seriously maintain that the doctrine of Africanus Spier is necessary for the salvation of the world. And much of the Journal is either philosophical or merely introspective. Seldom does Tolstoi in this record lead us up to the heights of ethical vision; more often he conducts us through the dark chambers of his own mind.

Yet in this very fact lies the value of the Journal. Few of the sayings it contains are valuable as isolated truths, and the whole is scarcely more enlightening than discouraging to those who are in search of light and leading; yet the collection of Tolstoi's day-to-day thoughts, sometimes futile, sometimes extreme, sometimes confused, occasionally penetrating, forms a vitally interesting document for the study of religious experience.